

**Women's Studies 2211F/English 2091F**  
**Girls on Fire: Constructions of Girlhood in Young Adult Dystopian Fiction**  
**Course Outline**  
**Fall 2017**

Instructor: Dr. Miranda Green-Barteet  
Office: 3245 Lawson Hall  
Office Hours: M 11:30-12:30, T 2-3, and  
by appointment

Email: mgreenb6@uwo.ca  
Class Time: M 1:30-4:30  
Location: KB 203

\*Email is the best way to contact me (email me directly rather than through the course's OWL site). During the week, I will respond to any questions or concerns within 24 hours, and on the weekend, I will respond within 48 hours.

Course Description and Objectives:

In *Girl Power: Girls Redefining Girlhood*, Dawn H. Currie, Deirdre M. Kelly, and Shauna Pomerantz point to the fact that “until recently, girlhood has been ‘the other’ of feminism’s womanhood: girlhood was defined negatively, against womanhood” in ways that present adult femininity as the successful abandonment of young or adolescent womanhood (4). Currie, Kelly, and Pomerantz’s thesis holds that girls in Western civilization at the turn of the twenty-first century are “reinventing” girlhood to suit their own ideas and desires in the face of the dueling narratives of *Reviving Ophelia* and *Girl Power*, which have positioned young women in a space that simultaneously highlights their vulnerability and proclaims their strength. While these two discourses do consider transformations of gender, its meanings, and the power to be gleaned from such transformations, they also re-work and re-code gender in familiar ways. In other words, while both *Reviving Ophelia* and *Girl Power* have drawn attention to the status and potential of the adolescent young woman, these movements have also, quite paradoxically, reinforced cultural expectations and limitations. YA dystopian novels such as *The Hunger Games*, *Divergent*, *Cinder*, and *Delirium*, among countless others published in the last ten years, feature strong female protagonists who openly rebel against the totalitarian societies in which they live. The circumstances of these dystopian futures enable characters like Katniss, Tris, Cinder, and Lena to be strong, active young women who willingly challenge authority, transgress gender norms, and even confront injustice when compelled to do so. Although these characters think little of the gendered stereotypes that limit their real life counterparts, they often end up reaffirming those gendered stereotypes in the conclusion of the series in which they are featured. In this course, we will consider how the recent spate of Young Adult dystopian fiction simultaneously subverts and affirms gendered expectations facing many young women in the 21st century. We will consider a variety of topics, including:

- How do the concerns of YA lit featuring female protagonists match the concerns of feminism?
- How does YA dystopian fiction lend itself to examinations of gender constructs, heteronormativity, and sexuality?
- What socio-cultural, philosophical, and/or artistic purposes does dystopian fiction serve, particularly when such books are written for an implied audience of young people?
- What particular kinds of definitions and/or portrayals of femininity, masculinity, and adolescence does YA dystopian fiction tend to offer?

- Why do so many of these books simultaneously challenge and reinforce constructs of gender and sexuality, and what implicit messages do these "mixed" signals impart to readers of all ages?

Throughout the semester, in addition to gaining and sharing knowledge through the assigned readings, you will

- apply rigorous critical thinking and analysis by engaging productively with new ideas;
- gain an understanding of literary genres and periods, specifically of Young Adult literature and dystopian fiction;
- have a sense of the way literature influences and is influenced by social constructions of gender;
- apply theory to literature;
- research, assess, and synthesize information;
- and locate, evaluate, and critique sources using appropriate disciplinary and/or interdisciplinary research skills and tools.

### Reading List

- *The Hunger Games*, Suzanne Collins
- *The Parable of the Sower*, Octavia Butler
- *Cinder*, Marissa Meyer
- *Love in the Time of Global Warming*, Francesca Lia Block
- *Delirium*, Lauren Collins
- *Pure*, Julianna Baggott

In addition to these novels, we will also be reading secondary source material, which I will post to OWL.

### Term Work

Class Blog & Participation	25%
Quizzes	35%
*(Quiz 1= 10%, Quizzes 2 & 3 = 12.5%)	
Research Assignment	15%
Paper (5 to 6 pages)	25%

Participation: In my opinion, the most successful college classrooms have students and instructors equally engaged in a discussion about the readings. I expect that all students will complete assigned course readings and will be prepared to discuss those readings on the appropriate day. I also expect that students will bring copies of course readings to class (hard copy is preferred, but electronic copies are acceptable). Class discussion will comprise a large part of our course, and while I recognize that not all students are comfortable speaking in class, I do expect that all students will be engaged and actively listening. I reserve the right to give reading quizzes should I find that students are not completing readings.

Class Blog: As part of our work together, we will maintain a collaborative course blog called Girls on Fire. It will be an online forum designed to expand on our readings and discussions. YA dystopian and speculative fiction are rich and diverse genres. It is impossible for us to address its entirety during a single semester. The blog is a means for you to introduce texts, topics, and critical approaches that may not be included on our syllabus, connecting them to the goals of the

course. As blogs are collaborative, you will have a writing partner; as a pair, your job will be to co-author one 800-1,000-word blog post during the semester. Two to three groups will write a blog post each week (by the end of the term, we will have authored 17+ blog posts). As an individual, your job will be to comment on at a total of 8 times on weekly posts throughout the term; it is your responsibility to keep track of your posts and to ensure you've completed the appropriate number by the end of term. It is my hope that, through the blog, we will engage in a sustained, critical dialogue about the ways girlhood is constructed in these popular YA texts.

Students will receive a detailed prompt and due dates during the second week of class.

Research Assignment: Students will complete a Research-based assignment during the term. Prompts will be discussed well in advance of due dates.

\*In addition to your co-authored blog post, you will each write a blog post as part of your research assignment.

Short Papers: Students will write 2 short papers throughout the term. Prompts will be discussed well in advance of due dates.

Quizzes: Students will take 3 quizzes throughout the term. The quizzes will include short answer and short essay questions. Students will be quizzed on their understanding of the novels and of their ability to apply our discussions of girls and girlhood to the novels.

### **Course Policies**

Academic Accommodation: Students seeking academic accommodation on medical grounds for any missed tests, exams, participation components and/or assignments worth (either alone or in combination) 10% or more of their final grade must apply to the Academic Counselling office of their home Faculty and provide documentation. Academic accommodation cannot be granted by the instructor or department.

Documentation shall be submitted, as soon as possible, to the Office of the Dean of the student's Faculty of registration, together with a request for relief specifying the nature of the accommodation being requested. The Student Medical Certificate (SMC) can be found at [http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf)

The full policy is available here:

[http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/accommodation\\_medical.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf)

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to MentalHealth@Western: <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

Students should also note that individual instructors are not permitted to receive medical documentation directly from a student, whether in support of an application for accommodation on medical grounds, or for other reasons (e.g. to explain an absence from class which may result in a grade penalty under an 'Attendance' policy in the course). **All medical documentation must be submitted to the Academic Counselling office of a student's home Faculty.**

Submitting Assignments: All assignments are due in-class on the date stated on the class schedule. You are expected to turn in both a hard copy of the assignment as well as to submit an electronic version to Turnitin.com (see below).

*Late assignments will not be accepted under any circumstances.* It is your responsibility to turn assignments in on time. Should you need an extension for any reason, please contact me by email at least 48 hours prior to the day an assignment is due to discuss an extension. Extensions may be granted for the writing assignments, but not for the Blog Posts. If you have a medical or personal emergency, notify me as soon as possible to request an extension (see above). In-class assignments cannot be made up unless the absence is excused.

Attendance Policy: The very nature of this course requires that you attend regularly to do well. You are, therefore, expected to attend all scheduled class meetings. Should you have more than three unexcused absences, you may receive up to a 5% deduction off of your final grade. See also: ‘**Academic Accommodation Policy**’ above.

Electronic Devices: Computers, e-readers, and tablets may be used for the purposes of taking notes and reading course texts so long as usage does not bother other students in class. I expect that electronic devices will be used ONLY for class purposes. At various points in the semester, depending on the nature of the day's discussion and assignments, I may ask you to put away electronic devices. Please refrain from using cell phones in class for any purpose other than reading course texts.

Owl/Sakai: The use of Owl/Sakai is necessary for successful completion of this course. This includes accessing readings as stipulated in the course outline, downloading instructions and guidelines for assignments, and submitting assignments to Turnitin.com. All course information, including assignments, will be posted on the course website.

Scholastic Offences, including Plagiarism: The University Senate requires the following statements, and Web site references, to appear on course outlines:

“Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site: [http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/scholastic\\_discipline\\_undergrad.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf).

Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea, or a passage of text from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offence (see Scholastic Offence Policy as above).

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (<http://www.turnitin.com>).”

Please consult the Department of English Studies "Information for Students" page for more information: <http://www.uwo.ca/english/undergraduate/info%20for%20students.html>.

Prerequisites: The University Senate requires the following statement to appear on course outlines: “Unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.”

Special Examinations, Incomplete Standing, and Aegrotat Standing: All requests for Special Examinations, Incomplete Standing, or Aegrotat Standing must be made by the student, with supporting documentation, to the Dean of Arts and Humanities Academic Counselling Office. The Dean’s office reserves the right not to sign INC and SPC grades without the proper paperwork. Special examinations must be written at the University or an Affiliated College no later than 30 days after the end of the examination period involved.